



ON "RAIN STAINED AWRY #s 8 & 43" BY JEREMY ERIC TENENBAUM

Beauty in decay is a theme I've always been attracted to. Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum was, too. Beauty in decay is one of the glories of Philadelphia in general, from the mansions of West Philly to how Broad Street looks as it passes through North Philly into the 'burbs. I've always had a special predilection for the Divine Lorraine hotel, where, as my Dad told me when I was young, you used to be able to get decent cafeteria meals on the cheap. Decay is the inverse side of another one of Jeremy's key facets— a love (skirting lechery and decadence) for youth and beauty, the charm and glamour of them together. The "Rain Stained Awry" series can be taken a number of different ways— the interpretive vista of beautiful decay could just as easily be construed as a critique of urban space, or even the fall of urban America into Recession and

entropy. I like beautiful decay best, because that gloss seems most simpatico with the Jeremy I remember— an artist who, like me and against the post-modern grain, cared deeply about beauty and ways and means of salvaging beauty from the contexts life presented us with, against or with our will.

“8” is especially beautiful to me for its peculiar composition and ambience of abject desolation. The process towards a shot like “8” having particular significance for us speeded up after ’06-’07— both because the social structures which had supported us had eroded into a shambles, and because our shambles mirrored the national and international scene. To the extent that a work of photographic art can haunt, “8” is haunting. Its forms are misshapen and obscurely pleasing at the same time— and Jeremy again finds a novel angle to play. I want to say “8” is a representatively American image, but I can’t— festoons like these are used all over the world, and that the forms together express a certain depth involves “8” in Europe and a profound past. In numerology, “8” is the number of Saturn, and there is something saturnine about the shot— it is more sober and hushed than was Jeremy’s wont. It signifies, with great visual truthfulness and candor, a party about to end.

“43” looks like it was taken in Upper Darby, a section of North Philadelphia notorious for its gnarled appearance. The figure under the overpass provides a center for the composition, but the focus of the shot is the street open-faced itself on a rainy day, decay overlaid on decay (to paraphrase an image from the I-Ching). The shot does one of Jeremy’s inversion tricks— it makes Upper Darby look delicious, enticing, and glamorous by setting lineation (horizontals and verticals) in harmonious motion around the hooded figure who occupies center stage. Harmonious motion is another agent to place against erosion in dynamic relation— erosion, which implies stasis, balanced and mastered. There is more than a little Tao in Jeremy’s methods— forces he channels allow him to represent natural polarities in the process of balancing and completing each other. It all happens in the context of clouds and cloudiness— the sky’s decay into being clotted.

These two shots represent the imposition of harmony from sheer force of will onto unpromising materials. Is the best art a manifestation of sheer willfulness? Jeremy, like myself and the rest of PFS, was willful but thoughtful about his willfulness, in a way American artists haven’t been before. Post-modernity amounted to the imposition of willful mindlessness, through which it knowingly guaranteed its own obsolescence. Thoughtless art generally doesn’t last; nor do thoughtless cultures. To make fair-grounds from waste lands, first in thought, then in form— that was one major PFS trick. No one among us did this trick with more panache than Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum.

Adam Fieled, 2013